

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE



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2012 Togiak Herring Season Summary

The following is a summary of the 2012 herring sac roe and spawn-on-kelp fisheries in the Togiak District, Bristol Bay. Herring are harvested for sac roe using gillnets and purse seines; while herring spawn on wild kelp (*Fucus spp.*) is harvested by hand. In July, a food and bait fishery occurs near Dutch Harbor primarily on the Togiak herring stock with the allocation based on the forecasted biomass of Togiak herring. The Dutch Harbor fishery is summarized separately. All data are preliminary.

STOCK ASSESSMENT

Biomass Estimation

Aerial surveys of the Togiak District began May 9, 2012. Herring were first reported in the district on May 13. Staff first observed herring on May 14 when 42,173 tons of herring and 2.1 miles of spawn were documented. On May 15, department staff documented 89,988 tons of herring and 16.0 miles of spawn. Weather prevented additional surveys until May 20 when staff documented 92,324 tons of herring and 10.7 miles of spawn on the grounds. The largest single biomass survey occurred on May 22 when 124,529 tons of herring and 1.5 miles of spawn were documented. The final survey of the Togiak herring district was flown on May 31. The department documented 31,594 tons of herring and 0.2 miles of spawn. A total of 30.5 miles of spawn were documented in 2012. As with past years, this does not represent the total amount of spawn that occurred because staff were unable to fly daily surveys due to weather constraints.

AGE COMPOSITION

A total of 7,069 herring from the commercial harvest were sampled between May 15 and 25. Information on age, size, and sex was gathered from each fish and samples were taken from the commercial purse seine and commercial gillnet fisheries. Sampling coverage was temporally and geographically well represented.

With approximately 32% of the herring sample aged, it appears that age-6 and under herring accounted for approximately 21% the Togiak commercial gillnet fishery while age-7 through

age-10 made up 54% and age-11+ herring accounted for the remaining 25%. Age-6 and under herring accounted for approximately 50% the Togiak commercial purse seine fishery while age-7 through age-10 made up 37% and age-11+ herring accounted for the remaining 12%.

The mean weight of sampled herring was 334 g; 311 g in the purse seine fishery and 424 g in the gillnet fishery. Females accounted for 55% of the fish sampled from the gillnet harvest and 47% of the fish sampled from the purse seine harvest. These estimates of age, size, and sex composition are based on inseason analysis and should be considered preliminary. Postseason analysis will be completed this fall and included in the Bristol Bay Annual Management Report (AMR) and in the Fisheries Data Report (FDR) associated with this fishery.

COMMERCIAL FISHERY

The Togiak District herring fisheries are managed in accordance with the **BRISTOL BAY HERRING MANAGEMENT PLAN (5 AAC 27.865)**, which was modified by the Alaska Board of Fisheries in December 2006. The plan specifies a maximum allowable exploitation rate of 20% and allocates the harvestable surplus among all the fisheries harvesting the Togiak herring stock. The 2012 preseason forecasted biomass was 123,745 tons. The projected harvest guideline for each fishery was as follows: 1,500 tons herring equivalent or 350,000 lbs. of product for the spawn-on-kelp fishery, 1,627 tons for the Dutch Harbor food and bait fishery, and the remaining 21,622 tons to the sac roe fishery. The management plan specifies that the department will manage the sac roe fishery so that 70% of the harvest is taken by purse seines (15,135 tons in 2012) and 30% of the harvest is taken by gillnets (6,487 tons in 2012).

The **BRISTOL BAY HERRING MANAGEMENT PLAN** and other regulations direct the department to conduct an orderly, manageable fishery and strive for the highest level of product quality with a minimum of waste. In recent years, the seine fleet has been comprised of processor-organized cooperatives. For the 2012 season, management staff again planned to allow long duration seine openings over a large area of the district and to let the processors limit harvest for their individual fleets based on processing capacity. Input from the fleet and industry has indicated that this slows the “race for fish” and allows for improved quality and value.

Department staff polled processing companies prior to the season to assess processing capacity for the 2012 season and to inquire about additional concerns or issues. The poll indicated that four companies would be participating in the 2012 Togiak herring fishery, only three of which would buy gillnet herring. The processing capacity for 2012 was estimated to be 1,970 tons per day, down 443 from 2011.

Purse Seine

The Togiak purse seine fishery opened at 6:00 p.m. on May 14 after staff documented 42,000 tons of herring on the grounds and several areas where spawning was occurring. The department initially opened the purse seine fishery for 76 hours. After the first 54 hours, there was 2,355 tons of fish harvested. There was some harvest as early as May 14 but it wasn't until May 16 that at least 3 companies had purchased herring. May 17 followed with virtually no harvest due to high winds, leaving the harvest for May 17 and 18 at 1,875 tons of herring. The relatively small harvests for the first five days of the fishery were due to poor weather, reduced processor participation, and not all processors at full capacity. Due to weather issues impacting the gillnet fishery, the area for the purse seine fishery was changed several times over the course of the fishery beginning May 16. These changes consisted of reducing the purse seine area in

Nunavachak Bay when the winds precluded gillnet fishing east of Right Hand Point and adding some additional area in Togiak Bay. Poor weather prevented fishing on May 17 so on May 18 the purse seine fishery was extended for 72 hours until 10:00 p.m. May 21. The fishery progressed over the next two days in an orderly manner with 2,150 and 2,040 tons of herring harvested on May 19 and 20. Through May 20 the purse seine fleet had harvested 55% of their quota. At the same time, the gillnet fleet was only at 21% of their quota and a significant portion of the fleet was suspended by their companies due to processing capacity issues for part of May 19 and again on May 21. Other gillnet operations had been on daily limits. The disparity in the harvest between gear groups increased each day since May 18. With part of the gillnet fleet restricted on May 21, the disparity was anticipated to increase again. Based on this trend, the restriction of the gillnet fleet, and the disparity between gear groups, the department let the purse seine opening close as scheduled on May 21 at 10:00 p.m. The department evaluated harvest information from May 22 on the morning of May 23 and, with a smaller disparity in allocation, reopened the purse seine fishery. Fishing reopened at noon on May 23 and reports indicated fair fishing. Unfortunately, fog rolled in that afternoon and reduced the effectiveness of the fleet. The harvest on May 23 was 1,260 tons, a relatively small harvest considering the 36-hour purse seine closure. Over the next several days, the harvest was relatively small considering the available processing capacity. The department continued extending the fishery 24 hours at a time, as there was still interest from industry and no biological concerns. On the morning of May 28, the department received a report of no harvest on May 27. There was still interest in fishing and still quota available so the department extended the fishery to 10:00 p.m. May 29. On the morning of May 29, again there was no reported harvest for the previous day and no more interest in continued fishing.

The 2012 Togiak sac roe purse seine fishery closed at 10:00 p.m. May 29. The total purse seine harvest was 13,084 tons of herring 86.6% of the quota. There were 16 purse seine vessels that participated in the fishery in 2012.

Gillnet

The Togiak gillnet fishery was opened at 6:00 p.m. May 14 until further notice with no prior test fishing. In 2012, there were only three companies participating in the Togiak sac roe gillnet fishery. Subsequently, participation by fishermen was also down. Processors expected 20 gillnet vessels to take part in the fishery but only 18 actually participated. This is down from 35 participants in 2010 and 25 in 2011. Although the season opened on May 14, the first day that all three companies harvested fish was May 18. This was partly due to a storm that prevented virtually all fishing beginning on May 16 and continuing until early May 18. Another factor is the recent trend of herring in the gillnet area tending to mature a day or two later than herring in the purse seine area. The gillnet fleet harvested 491 tons of herring through May 18. This was considered relatively good production for the small fleet. On May 19 however, processors imposed restrictions on their gillnet fleets that limited harvest. The May 19 gillnet harvest was 244 tons of herring. The best day of gillnet fishing occurred on May 20 when 633 tons of herring was harvested. The gillnet harvest on May 21 was also fairly good at 572 tons of herring, but it was limited again by processor restrictions. The department closed the purse seine fishery at 10:00 p.m. May 21 because of the continually increasing gap in the harvest percentages of the two gear groups. On May 22, with the purse seine fleet standing down and the gillnet fleet unrestricted, the gillnet harvest was only 496 tons. The gillnet fleet remained unrestricted by processors for the remainder of the 2012 season and the purse seine fishery

reopened at noon on May 23 after a 36-hour break. The gillnet harvest decreased for several days, dropping to 15 tons of herring on May 25. The fleet continued to fish and harvest improved and peaked again on May 30 with 356 tons of herring. The fishery was extended until June 5 to provide additional opportunity. The department felt that because of the late start, processor restrictions, poor weather and a considerable amount of quota remaining, additional opportunity was warranted. The gillnet harvest dropped off quickly after May 30 and by June 3 the entire gillnet fleet stopped fishing. The gillnet fleet of 18 vessels harvested 4,142 tons of herring, representing approximately 63.8% of the quota.

Spawn on Kelp

No companies registered to buy herring spawn-on-kelp in 2012, therefore there were no openings and no commercial harvest.

EXPLOITATION

The 2012 Togiak herring fisheries were managed for a maximum exploitation rate of 20% of the preseason biomass estimate. The purse seine harvest was 13,084 tons, with an average weight of 328 grams and an average roe percentage of 10.2%. The gillnet harvest was 4,142 tons, with an average weight of 406 grams and an average roe percentage of 11.7%, making the combined harvest 17,226 tons with an average weight of 347 grams and an average roe percentage of 10.6%. The Dutch Harbor food and bait fishery has not occurred at this time. If the Dutch Harbor fishery harvest is equal to the quota of 1,627 tons, then the total harvest for 2012 would be estimated at 18,853 tons. Based on the preseason biomass estimate of 123,745 tons, the 2012 exploitation rate would be approximately 15%.

EXVESSEL VALUE

The projected exvessel value of the 2012 Togiak herring fishery is approximately \$2.15 million. This is based on a grounds price estimate of \$125 per ton for seine caught fish and \$125 per ton for gillnet caught fish and does not include any postseason adjustments.